

## 'You want to take us to Jerusalem ...' Medinat Weimar: A Second Jerusalem in Contemporary Visual Arts and Klezmer Songs

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On 22 June 2008 a rally and a conference were organized in the German city of Weimar celebrating the establishment of a new movement: Medinat Weimar. According to an information sheet, which was handed out on-site and had been posted earlier on the internet, the purpose of the rally was to introduce the movement to the general public, while the conference was meant 'to broaden the collective element to the movement'.<sup>1</sup> The rally took place on the Theaterplatz from 11 AM till 1 PM, and the audience was encouraged to actively participate in the meeting and to bring homemade signs and banners. It was stated that 'Empty placards and markers will also be available so anyone can add their own slogans'. To the untrained eye it seemed yet another anti-fascist demonstration. Standard maxims were displayed, such as 'Rettet uns vor den Nazis', though more cryptic expressions and demands were also presented, such as 'Auch die Diaspora braucht ein Zuhause' and 'Koschere Bratwurst Jetzt!' (Fig. 11.1).

Since the average gentile would not be familiar with the Hebrew word for 'state', *Medīnat* (מְדִינָה), the ultimate goal of the gathering remained probably unclear to most of the general public and the guileless passers-by. Nevertheless both the movement's logo, a map of the German federal state of Thuringia (Thüringen) emblazoned with a Menorah, the Jewish seven-branched lamp stand, and its adage 'I ✳ Thuringia', clearly hinted at its ultimate objective: the foundation of Jewish State in this *Bundesland*, with Weimar as its capital. It seems rather *unheimlich*, though perhaps not inapposite, to found a New Jerusalem in Weimar, the birthplace of the first constitutional German Republic, which made way for Nazism and, one could argue, ultimately led to the Holocaust.

1 German: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/maarav/2577057417/>; English <http://www.flickr.com/photos/maarav/2577057959/> (accessed on 1 May 2012).



FIGURE 11.1 *Ronen Eidelman, Protester at the Medinat Weimar Rally with a sign demanding kosher bratwurst.* [HTTP://WWW.FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/MAARAV/2614191106/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/maarav/2614191106/) © COURTESY BY THE ARTIST.

### Weimar as a New Jerusalem

Prior to the public meeting a website ([medinatweimar.org](http://medinatweimar.org)) was launched by the artist Ronen Eidelman on which thirteen principles were posted, the first being: 'Medinat Weimar wishes to establish a Jewish state in Thuringia, Germany, with the city of Weimar as its capital'.<sup>2</sup> The second principal states that 'Medinat Weimar is a solution to overcome the present crises and heal Jewish trauma, German guilt, East Mediterranean conflicts, East German troubles and many other problems in the world'. While the beginning of the third principle places these aims in an artistic perspective, stating that 'Medinat Weimar will utilize the autonomy of art and its institutions', thus fixing its nationalist aspirations within the realm of the idealistic, the second part propagates using 'the tools of political campaigning and activism to convince the citizens of Ger-

2 <http://medinatweimar.org/> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

many, the European Union, the world[']s Jewish communities and the international community to support the founding of the state'.

Can we take both these mission statements equally serious? The political relativism of these maxims is further enhanced by point four which explicitly states that one is 'Jewish not through blood or ancestry but through similarity in mind, culture, common history and unity of fate'. It also becomes clear that 'Jews from non-European origin, Palestinians[,] Arabs (Muslim and Christian alike) and all other parties affected by the activities of the state of Israel are considered to share a common fate'; and that, according then to the fifth proclamation, even 'people from any background and nationality' are welcome to become active supporters of the cause'.

Then in a flurry of terminology, unbridled ambition takes the upper hand and it is boldly claimed that 'Medinat Weimar can play an important role in healing anti-Semitism, Schuldabwehrantisemitismus (guilt-defensiveness anti-Semitism), problematic expressions of Philosemitismus, both German and Jewish self hatred and the ongoing conflict between the Jewish, Arab and Muslim communities'. The term *Schuldabwehrantisemitismus* was introduced by Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) for a new kind of secondary anti-Semitism, consisting of prejudices that are directed against Jews, often disguised as a comparison of the Israeli policy to that of Nazi Germany, which functioned as a psychological defence mechanism for repressing feelings of guilt.<sup>3</sup>

This enumeration of final solutions is followed by an important proviso declaring that though Medinat Weimar does not want to replace the 'current state of Israel' [!] it addresses the failure of the Zionist state and wants to create a (proper) safe haven.<sup>4</sup> More universal beliefs are put forward in the eighth and ninth principles that insist on the right of 'self-redetermination' and 'self-redefinition', and the traversing of all ideological, cultural and religious trenches within the Israeli and German discourse. The tenth statement focuses on the reasons for the choice of Thuringia as the place for the foundation of this Jewish state, such as: 'its important place in German culture, history of anti-Semitism and German nationalism, legacy of Jewish life and culture as well as its shrinking population and a weak economy'.

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3 See for *Schuldabwehrantisemitismus* and 'sekundären Anti-Semitismus' (a term developed by Peter Schönbach): Adorno 1955/2003, pp. 121–324; Schönbach 1961, *passim*; Adorno 1962/1998, p. 362; and for a modern analysis: Rensmann 2004, p. 123 ff.; Uhrheimer 2006, pp. 100, 113; Quindeau 2007, pp. 157–64; Heni 2008, pp. 132–42; See for *Schuldabwehrantisemitismus* in Germany: Werner 2007.

4 'Medinat Weimar is not a replacement of the current state of Israel but a different Jewish state'.

The eleventh principle formulates in a roundabout way the political scope of Medinat Weimar, as being 'a sober and anti-fascist solution to many problems that the state of Thuringia is facing as a former East German province'. This fallacy ends with a catchphrase: 'A Jewish state is not a punishment but a prize', which is followed with the almost religious promise of redemption 'through Thuringia' for all German people, as well as the prospect of the liberation from the ghosts of the past. Elucidating this unexpected spiritual notion, the purpose of Medinat Weimar is pinpointed within the contemporary discourse. According to its twelfth principle it sets itself 'to question and explore the rise of nationalism versus the reality of globalization and migration and the re-emergence of religion as a cultural identifier versus the secular globalization of capital'.

The thirteenth principle, finally, offers some kind of solace for the restless reader, reducing the severity of earlier assertions, by emphasizing that 'Medinat Weimar is not a realistic movement, but rather one that seeks to agitate and provoke by taking anti-Semitic, neo-liberal, nationalistic, Zionist arguments to their unreasonable conclusions illustrating their inner logic and absurdity'. Thus, by purposefully undermining its very foundations, Medinat Weimar attempts to refute at first hand any fundamentalist adherence. The preamble of this last key point additionally whittles down the legitimacy of the underlying arguments, though its stratagem reaffirms the belief in the political objectives of the movement and its commitment to provocation as a means to an end.

Provocative intentions also become clear from Eidelman's other art projects, such as *Coming out in Lublin, Poland*, which was made as part of the 2010 Open City Festival – a festival of art in public spaces, curated by Krzysztof Zwirblis. In and around the old city centre of Lublin in Poland, Eidelman posted life-size reproductions of old black and white photographs portraying all kinds of Jewish people – 'Young, old, modern, religious, political activist ...'<sup>5</sup> – who had lived in those streets and houses from the late nineteenth century until World War II. In what he called 'a modest gesture', Eidelman wanted to return the people in the photos to the place from which they had been taken. Near the photos appeared different questions in Polish which were clearly intended to shock the reader, even if on a subliminal level, questions such as

5 '... Bundist, Zionist, nihilists, bourgeois, Hasidic, yeshiva student, communist, who knows?', citation from introductory text 'Coming out in Lublin, Poland' by Ronen Eidelman, uploaded 30 June on: [roneneidelman.com/?p=569](http://roneneidelman.com/?p=569); <http://www.rebelart.net/diary/ronen-eidelman-coming-out-in-lublin-polen/005363/>

‘Does your family hide a great mystery/secret?’, ‘Does your grandmother mumble in her sleep in a foreign tongue?’, and ‘What kind of Jew are you?’<sup>6</sup>

More shock and awe has been avowedly engendered in an earlier artistic venture, called *Magav in Weimar*, that Eidelman clandestinely undertook in 2008 in Thuringia’s cultural capital, and which is directly related to the *Medinat Weimar project*. The artist intended to bring an armoured jeep of the Israeli border police into the streets of Weimar, but could not do so for obvious reasons, and therefore built a two-dimensional life size cut out instead, like the fake police cars that deter drivers from speeding. This mock-up jeep was subsequently mounted on the side of shopping cart and Eidelman went out on patrol, or rather, was escorted by this out-of-place vehicle.

The jeep was pushed from behind by an assistant of whom only the lower legs are visible in three short YouTube video clips that were uploaded in 2008: *Magav in front of Goethe House*, *Magav escorting me on the streets of Weimar*, *Magav in front of Bauhaus-Universität, Weimar*.<sup>7</sup> When Eidelman parked the jeep near to the Gauforum, a building complex built for the national-socialist party administration, he was asked by a female official to kindly move it. Her rationale was not so much that the artist had no permission, but more importantly since ‘the Gauforum has such an ugly history that they need to watch out about what messages are being sent’. Reflecting on what she said, Eidelman noted the irony by remarking that: ‘Almost anywhere in Germany where I would park the jeep I would be parking on ugly history’.<sup>8</sup>

In an interview by Nat Muller for the sixth issue of *Visual Foreign Correspondents*, in de Balie Amsterdam, on the 15th April 2008, Eidelman elucidated some aspects of his *Magav in Weimar* project.

Magav (the Israeli border police) have a well-deserved reputation for violent treatment of minorities and underprivileged people, both in Israel and the Palestinian territories. In addition to the daily harassments on the streets, during demonstrations and direct actions, while exercising

6 *Czy w twojej rodzinie jest wielka tajemnica; Czy twoja babcia mamrocze w obcym języku przez sen?; Jakim Żydem jesteś?*

7 We may safely assume that the uploader (amhaaretz) is Eidelman himself. The term *Am ha'aretz* אִם הָאֶרֶץ means ‘the people of the Land’. ‘Magav in front of Bauhaus-Universität, Weimar’, ‘Magav escorting me on the streets of Weimar’, ‘Magav in front of Goethe House’, video clips uploaded on January 29, 31 and February 1, 2008, last accessed 1 May, 2012, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l45bWwb1nLs>; [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_w4pDqwLi7M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_w4pDqwLi7M); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xnT3ieL6Zw>.

8 Muller 2008, s.p.

their democratic rights, demonstrators get beaten, tear-gassed, shot at with live and rubber bullets, and arrested by these forces, whose mission should be to protect citizens not to attack them. I myself experienced all these "treatments" over the years of being active in anti-occupation and anti-capitalist direct actions groups. So when I see them patrolling the streets I don't feel safe for myself, or my neighbours. Still, I decided to bring the Israeli border police to Weimar due to the unusual situation which is comprised of the unique relationship between Israel and Germany, the catastrophic past and because of the place Israel's security forces take up within the discourse about security and militarism.

Eidelman acknowledges that even though not everyone would have been aware of the significance of the jeep – or for that matter be familiar with the situation in Israel/Palestine – all should have recognized that it is a militarized jeep.

And while a fake jeep does more or less the same job and provokes discussion just as much as would a real one, the mock-up vehicle has, moreover, a specific connotation since 'the two-dimensional façade barley [barely] standing on its wooden frame, is very much like the fake façades of Weimar's historic building'.<sup>9</sup> On his site Eidelman wrote that his aim was to examine what this action would bring about and how the presence of a militarized police force from Israel in a small quiet East German town would be perceived: 'Would it produce fear, antagonism, discomfort or maybe understanding and sympathy? The site of the Star of David is never neutral on the streets of Germany, all the more so when it is painted on an armored jeep'.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that Medinat Weimar is not a real political movement, it had several offices in Europe, in the form of impermanent installations which were part of smaller and larger exhibitions. A 'temporary Swedish headquarters' was established at Tegen2 gallery in Stockholm in October 2009, thus constituting the showpiece for a solo exhibition (Fig. 11.2). According to Eidelman the Kingdom of Sweden – the then president of the European Union – could play 'a role in forwarding the vision of the movement and can help persuade

9 '[...] The façades, historical manipulations, and the cultural cloning wish to suggest authenticity, but they do have to be really convincing to fulfill their purpose and to create in Weimar the romantic Disneyland of the east. In the same way, security can work as a façade. It does not really have to be convincing, you don't need expensive systems, trained personnel, intelligence, and expertise. What is needed is a pretence of security, feeling of security, the knowing of its being and the statement that it is present'.

10 <http://ronen.dvarim.com/> (accessed on 1 May 2012).



FIGURE 11.2 *Ronen Eidelman, Office of Medinat Weimar, October 2009. INSTALLATION AT TEGEN2 GALLERY, STOCKHOLM © COURTESY BY THE ARTIST.*

the European community as well as their German neighbors in [sic] the vitality of the idea'.<sup>11</sup>

Earlier that year, in June, a *Ma'achaz* (outpost; handhold, foothold; stronghold) was erected at the 53rd Venice Biennale; in reality a cardboard cut-out or "two-dimensional scale model" of a building. On Eidelman's personal website we can read that due to insufficient financial resources 'Medinat Weimar decided in the spirit of Zionism to defer reality and settle with a symbolic Pavilion at Giardini'.<sup>12</sup> That the Medinat Weimar project is still ongoing proves Eidelman's contribution to the recent *Heimatkunde* exhibition, which was held at the Jewish Museum in Berlin from September 16th 2011 till January 29th 2012. In this exhibition, given the subtitle *30 Künstler blicken auf Deutschland*, works

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/maarav/4995479917/> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

<sup>12</sup> <http://roneneidelman.com/?p=304>, posted 24 June 2009: 'Rather than adopt to the reality that the Jewish state in Thuringia does not exist and the movement for the state has no financial ability to rent a space and hold a decent exhibition (like the Palestinian and gypsy participations)...'





FIGURE 11.3 *Ronen Eidelman*, Office of Medinat Weimar at the Heimatkunde exhibition, 2011/2012. INSTALLATION AT JÜDISCHES MUSEUM, BERLIN © COURTESY BY THE ARTIST.

had been gathered that all address key aspects of their perceptions of “Germany” and “in Germany”.<sup>13</sup>

Eidelman's Berlin installation consisted, as had been the case in Stockholm, of a table with paperwork and a map on the wall (Fig. 11.3). Only now the table has acquired more the character of a desk, of a proper office space, instead of an exhibition stand. The two white table flags have been replaced by one big white flag hanging from the wall. The accessories have been extended to include writing utensils, a cylindrical money-box, and a metal bowl filled with *button* badges bearing slogans like ‘It's safe now / You can come back’ and ‘I ☆ Thuringia’. Most importantly, the installation was made more interactive, by means of a TV screen mounted above the desk, showing a propaganda film.<sup>14</sup>

There is only one component that actually returns from the previous installation: a picture of the comedian Mel Brooks. It is no longer hanging between

13 See: Kampmeyer 2011; <http://www.jmberlin.de/heimatkunde/ausstellung/en/ausstellungeninfo.php> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

14 Pictures of the office in the Jewish Museum in Berlin were posted on the Medinat Weimar website on 19 September 2011.



other famous (more long-faced) Jews on the wall, as in Stockholm, but stands on a desk in a frame as if to show a portrait of a loved one. In this way, the seriousness of the entourage seems dismissed with a wink. What is remarkable in comparison to this *comic relief* and earlier verbalizations of the project is the more serious and unswerving political tone of a statement that was published in the exhibition catalogue, and as well on the website:

The Medinat Weimar movement not only supports the efforts of young Jewish Israelis to obtain a second passport from a European country or even to take on German nationality. It also offers a vision of a social utopia that aims to stop the decline of Thuringia's population and combat the popularity of radical right-wing ideology. Medinat Weimar draws on various ideas discussed in connection with the Zionist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>15</sup>

It is well known that thousands of Israelis are reclaiming their EU citizenship as Israel's security concerns escalate; German passports are especially popular.<sup>16</sup>

It seems that – at least within the context of this exhibition – Medinat Weimar intended to generate a more serious political discussion. This also becomes clear from the audio recording of a panel discussion with 'activists of the committee Medinat Weimar', that took place on 14 January 2012 at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, and which was moderated by Cilly Kugelmann, curator of the exhibition.<sup>17</sup> More tellingly this *Podiumsgespräch* was given the title 'Weimar, das künftige Jerusalem?'. Participants in the discourse were Sami Khatib, a cultural scientist and activist in the movement, who is a son of a Palestinian father and German mother, and other representatives of the academic world, Professor Liz Bachhuber of the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, and Professor Dr Hanne Seitz of the Fachhochschule Potsdam. Central to the discussion was the distinction between exhibition and public space, between art and political action campaign.

15 See for the German text: Berlin 2011, p. 54; <http://www.jmberlin.de/heimatkunde/kuenstler/eidelman.php> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

16 Gideon Levy, 'Fear is driving Israelis to obtain foreign passports', *Haaretz* (2 June 2011); Tzvika Brot, 'German passport popular in Israel', *Israel News* (31 May 2011).

17 *Weimar, das künftige Jerusalem? Podiumsgespräch mit Aktivisten des Komitees «Medinat Weimar»*, Berlin, 14 January 2012. <http://www.jmberlin.de/heimatkunde/ausstellung/begleitprogramm.php#medinat> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

As an introduction to the talk Cilly Kugelmann compares *Medinat Weimar* with a similar art project, the *Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland* (JRMiP), by the Israeli-Dutch artist Yael Bartana. The fictitious Jewish Renaissance Movement, which promotes the return of 3.3 million Jews to Poland, is simulated through videos, stories, and conferences.<sup>18</sup> Bartana's cinematographic trilogy, *Mary Koszmary (Nightmare)* (2007), *Mur i wieża (Wall and Tower)* (2009), and *Zamach (Assassination)* (2011), was part of the official Polish contribution to the 54th International Art Exhibition in Venice of 2011, called ... *and Europe will be stunned*. According the official website 'Bartana tests reactions to the unexpected return of the 'long unseen neighbour' and recalls the forgotten motif of alternative locations for the state of Israel that were once considered by Zionists, such as Uganda'.<sup>19</sup> The First International Congress of the JRMiP was held 11th-13th May 2012 in Berlin.<sup>20</sup>

A quote by Bartana, which Kugelmann cites in the talk, is very similar to a statement that Bartana made for a German radio station: 'Wir wollen zurück. Nicht nach Uganda, Argentinien, Syrien oder Madagaskar. Auch nicht nach Palästina, sondern nach Europa, in den Kontinent unserer Väter und Vorväter. Ganz besonders Polen liegt uns am Herzen, das immer noch in unseren Gedanken und Träumen existiert ...'<sup>21</sup> The idea of an alternative settlement of the Jewish state seems to have a revival in popular culture, and the folly of it is brilliantly depicted in a 2008 episode of the CBS sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, in which one of the main characters, Sheldon Cooper, plans to win the Nobel Peace Prize by building an exact replica of Jerusalem in the Mexican desert, even with a wailing wall 'exactly like the one in Jerusalem, but close to taco stands and cheap prescription drugs'.<sup>22</sup>

From the perspective of historical justice (*Historische Gerechtigkeit*), Kugelmann refers to Hannah Arendt's opinion that Germany is to blame for the conflict in the Middle East, and therefore – as the latter once whimsically added in a polemic – should put a piece of land at Israel's disposal.<sup>23</sup> When asked which

18 Perutz 2012. According to Eidelman 'There are a lot of Polish people upset because they feel that they deserve the Jews more than the Germans', in: *Podiumsgespräch*, Berlin, 14 January 2012. (See above).

19 <http://labiennale.art.pl/en/exhibition> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

20 <http://www.jrmip.org/> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

21 Richter 2010, s.p.

22 *The Big Bang Theory*, Season 1, episode 12, "The Jerusalem Duality", written by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, directed by Mark Cendrowski, storyline by Jennifer Glickman & Stephen Engel, and teleplay by Dave Goetsch & Steven Molaro, aired 14 April 2008, program code 3T66.

23 Arendt's remark could not be traced by me.

were the motivations for moving Herzl's Jewish State to Thuringia, Eidelman brings up the need for nationalism, his personal experience as a minority ('the other') in Weimar, and the present danger for the *first* Jewish state in Israel, which is, according to him, not so much threatened from outside (by Iran) as from within. And though Eidelman does not oppose the State of Israel, and is even willing to fight for it, he fully acknowledges the need for a Plan B, which in time took the form of *Medinat Weimar*.

As a supporter of the movement Sami Khatib repudiates the interpretation of its inherent nationalism in a literal sense by describing *Medinat Weimar* as a 'Statenloser Staat', 'Anti-Staat' and 'Paradoxie eines Staates', while emphasizing its Messianic notions of a promised land, where *all* people could live together peacefully.<sup>24</sup> The question is whether such a state is still Jewish, and to what extent it should be. *Medinat Weimar* is therefore characterized by Khatib as a 'Staat der Staatenlosen' (*State of Stateless*), 'Staat der Wurzellosen' (*State of the rootless or uprooted*), an obvious paradox, since these notions are stereotypes which have been ascribed to Judaism in classical anti-Semitism, and in addition enable us to consider *Medinat Weimar* as a Jewish experience, though they could easily fit other peoples. This phenomenon is called "universal singularity" in modern philosophy.<sup>25</sup> Khatib refers also to Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) who said: 'Wir Juden sind kein Staatsvolk. Die anderen Völker übrigens auch nicht'.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand and for his part, Eidelman claims, as he did in the fourth principle of *Medinat Weimar* in a somewhat platitudinous way, that its inhabitants would be bound together by fate, because all people share a common future, referring to Martin Buber's speech for the twelfth Zionist Congress of 1921. But Buber has not only argued that a people is defined by a common fate, but also that a people is a "natural" community, which he distinguished from a "symbolic" community of a religious nature (i.e. church).<sup>27</sup> It seems beyond dispute that *Medinat Weimar* is essentially symbolic *by nature* and has religious (Messianic) traits.

Time and again, the speakers of the Podiumsgespräch draw attention to the differentiation between the virtual and the real world of *Medinat Weimar*, often demarcated by the border between art and politics. Liz Bachhuber rightly

24 Khatib, *Podiumsgespräch*, Berlin, 14 January 2012. Khatib is writing a Ph.D. thesis on Walter Benjamin's messianic Marxism.

25 See for universal singularity, the figure which combines the dimension of *One* with the dimension of 'for all': Badiou 1997, p. 80.

26 Scholem 1995–2000, vol. 1, p. 82.

27 Buber 1921; Baum 2001, pp. 32–33.

notes 'Auch fiktionale Wirklichkeiten haben Auswirkung auf uns'.<sup>28</sup> Kugelman speaks of a *Diasporic Utopia* and interprets Medinat Weimar – 'Eine Staat ohne Territorium aber mit einem Hymne' – foremost as an art project and not as a political project.<sup>29</sup> This internal conflict had already risen painfully to the surface when the board of the Bauhaus University had expressed its concerns, fearing that 'the visitors, press, the Jewish community, the State of Israel, the Palestinians and other Arab visitors and Neo-Nazis would not be able to identify it as an art project'.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the question arises of what kind of population this state would consist of and which language would be spoken in this *Diasporic Utopia*. Eidelman says that the question is difficult to answer because 'we don't know who will arrive'. Within this context he mentions Daniel Kahn (from Detroit) and Psoy Korolenko (from Moscow), two modern *klezmerim* (professional Jewish musicians) who already live in Berlin, to illustrate that Jews (and not only Jews) are already coming to Germany. Both musicians are the composers of the hymn that is used as a leader in the promotional video shown at the Berlin exhibition and on the website.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, Professor Hanne Seitz notes that, although the project began in the real world, with concrete actions (*Handlungsvollzüge*) such as the public manifestation and the Jeep performance, since then 'nothing has happened in real space' but only in discourses. By implication, she mentions the multianual project of the city of *Stufurt*. Launched in 1999 by Michael Kurzwelly, this project by a German – Polish association strives for the reunification of Frankfurt an der Oder and the Polish town of Ślubice on the other side of the river, which used to form a single town until 1945.<sup>32</sup> This project assumed a real dimension when the name *Stufurt* was entered into the Register of European City Names (REC�) in 2000. Seitz wonders how *Medinat Weimar* project will continue to manifest itself in real life, since actions are indispensable for the

28 Bachhuber, *Podiumsgespräch*, Berlin, 14 January 2012.

29 Kugelman, *Podiumsgespräch*, Berlin, 14 January 2012: '... ein Kunstprojekt und kein politisches Projekt in der ersten Linie'.

30 'Man hatte Bedenken [...] dass Besucher, Presse, jüdischen Gemeinden, der Staat Israel, der Palästinenser und andere Arabischen Besucher und Neo-Nazi's nicht in der Lage sein dat Projekt als Kunst zu identifizieren', as cited by Kugelman in the *Podiumsgespräch*, Berlin, 14 January 2012.

31 <http://www.jmberlin.de/heimatkunde/kunstwerke/en/eidelman.php>; 'Medinat Weimar Promotional Video', videoclip (uploaded by amhaaretz on 12 September 12 2011), YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVGeR4r5hbk> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

32 See: Asher 2012. [http://www.slubfurt.net/en\\_start.html](http://www.slubfurt.net/en_start.html) (accessed on 1 May 2012).

creation of identity.<sup>33</sup> She asks if *the music*, which has recently played a more important role within the movement, is the path to follow.<sup>34</sup> Since this question remains unanswered in the panel discussion it seems appropriate to go into the matter here.

### Shpil zhe mir a lidele oyf YouTube?

First and foremost, it is important to note that the national anthem of Medinat Weimar is sung in Yiddish. This High German language of Ashkenazi Jewish origin is in often a unifying factor for Jewish identity-formation, especially for secular Jews – not exclusively those with an Eastern-European background – who do not (want to) derive their Jewishness from religious culture or Zionism. The lyrics, as written by Daniel Kahn and Psoy Korolenko are simple: '*Eynem a tog 'kh vel oyle zayn, in Eretz Thüringen arayn. Eretz Thüringen! Eretz Thüringen! Eretz Thüringen, vu bist du?*', which translates as: 'One day, I want to be a pilgrim/an immigrant, in the Land of Thuringia. The Land of Thuringia! Land of Thuringia, where are you?'<sup>35</sup>

Two things come to our attention. To begin with, there is no mention of *Medinat Weimar*; the "Weimar State," as a twist to the Weimar Republic. Instead we hear of *Eretz Thüringen*, "Land of Thuringia" as in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, the biblical name for the Holy Land, which as a concept has been evoked by the founders of the actual State of Israel. Secondly, the word *oyle* stands out, which is normally used for the Jewish immigrant to Palestine/Israel.

The second stanza goes: '*Eynem a tog 'kh vel zoykhe zayn, in Eretz Thüringen arayn. ayyah-yah-ay, in Eretz Thüringen arayn!*' (One day, I want to be worthy to enter / live to see the Land of Thuringia.) Interestingly, this second stanza is sung as an opening canto by Kahn en Korolenko in the YouTube clip *The Internationale greet Medinat Weimar* of 2009, though with the *Eretz Thüringen* re-

33 Yael Bartana tried to actively involve outsiders in the identity-building process of the JRMiP by introducing membership cards and recruiting delegates and active participants for the First International Congress.

34 Seitz, in the *Podiumsgespräch*: 'Die Musik spielt jetzt, glaub ich, seit neuestem mehr ein Rolle, also da will Ich fragen, geht es vielleicht in dieser Richtung weiter, ...dass also Handlungen passiere'.

35 <http://www.jmberlin.de/heimatkunde/kunstwerke/en/eidelman.php> 'Medinat Weimar Promotional Video', videoclip (uploaded by amhaaretz on 12 September 2011), *Youtube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVGeR4r5hbk> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

frain in stead of the *ay yah-yah-ay*.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, one hears not *vu* ("woo") *bist du*, as in the promotional video, but *vi* ("wee"), which could be interpreted as a Mideastern (Polish/Galician) or Southeastern (Ukrainian) Yiddish pronunciation of the word for 'where', but must be more likely understood as 'how', as in "Land of Thuringia, how are you?", which seems very appropriate for a greeting.<sup>37</sup>

In this clip, first one hears the tune of *The Internationale*, the hymn of international Socialism, being played by Kahn on a music box mechanism. Then follows the anthem, lustily sung by Korolenko and Kahn, who afterwards greet the Congress for a New Jewish state in Thüringen. Next a little speech is held in Yiddish by the two, which they instantly translate into English, Russian, and German, the core being: '*Nor mit a nayer un frayer veymarer republik ken man shafn fun daytshland a taytsh-land, un fun eyrope a nay-eyrope*', which they artistically construed in English as: 'Only by building a new and free Weimar Republic we can truly make Germany a Jewmany and Europe a Newrope', while in the German translation Germany is to be made 'ein Bedeut-Land', a *meaning-land*, a literal translation of the Yiddish word *taytsh* (meaning) + *land*.

The video session proceeds with a musical transliteration of the poem *Dos naye lid* (The New Song) by Avrom Reyzen (1876–1953), which was first published in 1918.<sup>38</sup> It was translated by Heinz Kahlau (1931–2012) into German for a GDR folk song book.<sup>39</sup> We hear a trilingual performance in Yiddish, German and English of the text '*Un zol vi vayt nokh zayn di tsayt fun libe un fun sholem dokh kumen vet, tsi fri, tsi shpet di tsayt – es iz keyn kholem!*'<sup>40</sup> The lines that

36 'Internationale greet Medinat Weimar', video clip (uploaded by amhaaretz on 26 June 2009), YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmZHAxlchQ> The video description speaks of: 'Psoy Korolenko and Danik Redlick of the The Internationale send their greeting to The Movement for a Jewish State in Thuringia, Germany'.

37 Weinreich 2008, vol. 2, p. A499 (notes to p. 452); See for vowel difference in the dialects: Jacobs 2005, p. 30 ff., and for the Yiddish transcription and the romanization of 'vu': p. xvi, note 2, p. 302. Compare the variations in songs as *Vu/vi bist du geven?* and *Vi/vu iz dus gesele?*

38 Reyzen 1947, p. 42; Reyzen 1951. See also: The Papers of Vladimir Heifetz, 1881–2001, RG 1259, Series XVIII – Add., folder 207 at the YIVO Institute.

39 Jaldati, Rebling & Kahlau 1966. The German text was published on [medinatweimar.org/2008/06/10/anthem-for-medinat-weimar](http://medinatweimar.org/2008/06/10/anthem-for-medinat-weimar), but has now been removed.

40 The literal translation being: And how long away will be the time of love and peace, but will come too early, too late, the time – it is not a dream.

Kahn sings in English are: 'The morning breaks, the world awakes to rise and to face the hour. So one and all come hear the call to glory hope and power'.<sup>41</sup>

In the video description on YouTube we can read that 'Punk-Cabaret musician Daniel Kahn has recommended *this* song as the anthem for the movement [of Medinat Weimar]'.<sup>42</sup> This hymn, often sung in Yiddish schools in the United States, should not be confused with a workers song (of the Jewish Labour Movement) with the same name, as Eidelman probably did when he called it 'an old Bund freedom song' in the clip's description.<sup>43</sup> As an outro to the clip Kahn wants to declaim *Eretz Thüringen* again, but quasi-accidentally starts to sing *Eretz Yisroel*, correcting his mistake promptly with an 'Oh', followed by the proper wording, and backed-up vocally by Korolenko.

### Music, Language and Image

In the Berlin *Podiumgespräch* the formative principles of Jewish identity were discussed, as well as the ideological basis for Medinat Weimar, such as the defence against an experienced prosecution, but also a (Non-Zionist) national Jewish awareness, which was fed by the fact that Eastern-European Jewry had an important *cultural denominator*, namely its own language (Yiddish). Yiddish emerged, after all, as the *lingua franca* of a large Jewish community in Eastern Europe which renounced Zionism and sought Jewish cultural unity and autonomy in Europe. For this reason it seems logical to choose the mother tongue (*mameloshn*) of the once prosecuted as one of the official languages (besides German and English) for *Medinat Weimar*, as Kahn and Korolenko did in their musical tributes. And how does their CD *The Internationale* relate to the Medinat Weimar, and first and foremost, what *is* and *concerns* this so-called Internationale?

Language and music appertain to the foremost of five areas of Jewish experience: Jewish culture and tradition. The others are: Israel (Zionism), Shoah (Holocaust), personal history and local culture and background.<sup>44</sup> The interest in klezmer music and especially Yiddish songs provided a bonding mechanism for Jewish identity throughout the twentieth century. From the late 1970s there was a klezmer revival in the United States and Europe. Singing in Yiddish

41 See for another English version by Gus Tyler: Mlotek 1997.

42 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmZHAXllchQ> (accessed on 1 May 2012).

43 See for the latter song: Alter 1957, pp. 28–30. See: Zemtsovsky 2006, p. 216 with note 41 on pp. 472–73.

44 Compare: Abram 1994, p. 10 ff.



was propagated in the U.S. by Michael Alpert, Adrienne Cooper, and in Europe by Ben Zimet and Manfred Lemm, amongst many others. Although the old guard certainly has not disappeared from the scene, since the beginning of the twenty-first century a second klezmer revival is going on.

This revival is characterized by a multitude of styles and backgrounds among the musicians, coming from all corners from the world, but principally operating from Germany. The musical genres range from pop (*Fayvish*), heavy metal (*Gevolt*), glam rock (*Yiddish Princess*), disco (*Jewrythmics*), electro (*Jewdyssee*) to folk punk (*The Painted Bird*), while still more authentic, classical and jazz variants of klezmer prevail. The success of some of these peculiar klezmer crossovers could be explained by internet-globalism which guarantees the existence of such cultural niches.

The participation of non-Jews in the formation of Jewish identity, as intended by Eidelman, is already happening in the musical world.<sup>45</sup> Sometimes this overt multiculturalism is very much cultivated. Geoff Berner for instance has released a modern Chinese version of the classic song *Mayn Rue Plats* (My Resting Place) by Morris Rosenfeld (1862–1923).<sup>46</sup> It is no coincidence that Berner and his compatriot Benjy Fox-Rosen, are considered participants of the so-called *Klezmer Bund* founded by Daniel Kahn.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes called "Alienation Klezmer Bund" or "Verfremdungsklezmer Bund" by Kahn, Rokhl Kafrissen recognized it as 'an overt nod to Brecht's theory of Verfremdungseffekt'.<sup>48</sup> There is a song about this organization on the CD *Lost Causes* (2010) by Daniel Kahn & The Painted Bird, backed-up by a chorus of famous klezmer musicians.<sup>49</sup>

Although Kahn and Eidelman share a fascination for alienation, and both are clearly antifascist, Kahn seems more actively involved in the *leftist/anarchist* protest movement. We have already noted that Eidelman was not against the State of Israel, but is this also the case for Kahn and Korolenko? Their CD *The Internationale* – a combined artistic effort with the band *Oy Division* – features a Russo-English translation of the song *Oy, ir narishe tsienistn* ("Oh, You

45 See for this phenomenon in Poland: Waligórska 2005.

46 Geoff Berner, *Victory Party*, CD/LP, Mint Records, MRD132/MRL-132, 2011, no. 4. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory\\_Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory_Party)

47 [http://geoffberner.com/?page\\_id=2](http://geoffberner.com/?page_id=2): "They represent the flowering of a reborn radical Jewish culture, what Berner's tour mate Daniel Kahn of Berlin band The Painted Bird calls the "Klezmer Bund".

48 Kafrissen 2009, s.p. She is working on a book called *The Myth of the Yiddish Atlantis*.

49 Daniel Kahn & The Painted Bird, *Lost Causes*, CD/Digi-pack, Oriente Musik, RIEN CD 77, 2011 [2010], no.12 'The Klezmer Bund'.

*Foolish Little Zionists*").<sup>50</sup> This socialist folksong was first recorded November 26, 1930 in Kiev by the ethnomusicologist Moshe Beregovski (1892–1961), as sung by house painter Ts. Lachman Gersh of Medzhybozhe (Ukraine).<sup>51</sup>

The album title, *The Unternationale*, not only seems to allude to the socialist song *The International*, but is also a clear reference to the International Workingmen's Association (1864–1876), often called the First International, since a similar wording, 'The First Unternational', appears on the front page of the CD booklet. An anti-Semitic caricature is depicted on this cover, showing a hook-nosed, bearded man, wearing a golden crown with a golden calf on top, who grasps a world globe with his bony fingers which resemble a bat's talons (Fig. 11.4B).

This recycled political cartoon, *Rothschild*, drawn by Charles-Lucien Léandre (1862–1930, was first published in the French satirical magazine *Le Rire* on April 16, 1898 (Fig. 11.5).<sup>52</sup> Often thought to depict the then long deceased Jakob Mayer Rothschild (1792–1868), founder of the French branch of the Rothschild family bank, this ghastly figure is more likely to represent a more general image of the "Jewish Threat", epitomized by the Rothschild family, considering the inscription on the aureole which reads "DIEU PRO[TÈGE] ISRAËL" (May God protect Israel).<sup>53</sup> According to Jean-Michel Renault 'le banquier Rothschild représente l'archétype du juif capitaliste dont l'ambition est de s'accaparer toutes les richesses du monde'.<sup>54</sup>

Arguably depicting a specific member of the prominent banking family, this iconic "predatory Jew", who stretches his demonic hands around the globe, is often associated with the idea of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world, and has repeated itself ever since in pictorial tradition of caricature. Fredrik Strömberg suggests a temporal connection with the propaganda book *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an elaborate anti-Semitic hoax – though that was only first published in Russian in 1906.<sup>55</sup> The book purports to document the

50 Daniel Kahn, Psoy Korolenko, Oy Division, *The Unternationale / Унтернаціонал / אינטערנאַציאָנאַל* 7, CD/Digi-pack, Auris Media Records, AUM014, 2008.

51 The Phonoarchive of Jewish Folklore at the Vernadsky National Library, no. 1247, A 694.3. Selected for vol. 1 of the anthology ЕМФ, no. 66. See: Sholokhova 2001. Digital source: <http://mlib.ipri.kiev.ua/> (accessed on 1 May 2012). See also: *Tsaytshrift* (Minsk: Inbelkult) 19, col. 805. See for Beregovski: Slobin 1986.

52 See: Fuchs 1921, p. 209; Matard-Bonnucci 2005, pp. 32, 447.

53 Rosenberg 1960, facing p. 135. (Often recognized as a portrait "Mayer" Rothschild – there were several with that second name – and sometimes wrongly attributed to Gustave Doré) See: Freedman 2008, p. 49.

54 Renault 2006.

55 Strömberg 2010, p. 26.



FIGURE 11.4A,B Covers of the gatefold and booklet of the CD The Internationale. AURIS MEDIA RECORDS, AUM014, 2008.



FIGURE 11.5 Charles Léandre, “Rothschild” or “Dieu protège Israël”: An Anti-Semitic Cartoon of the Predatory Jew grasping the Globe, 1898. NEW YORK: HOLOCAUST MUSEUM, PHOTOGRAPH #06328.

minutes of a secret conference of Jewish leaders discussing their goal of global Jewish hegemony.<sup>56</sup> A French edition of the book from the 1930s indeed shows a figure in a similar pose as Léandre’s *Rothschild* (Fig. 11.6).<sup>57</sup>

The artwork designers, Victor Levin and Chen Langer, have connected a speech balloon to Rothschild’s mouth that reads ‘Pleased to meet you’ in Yiddish, Russian and English, followed by ‘hope you guess my name ...’, referring to the first song of the CD, *Rakhmones afn tayfl*, a klezmer version of the Stones’ song *Sympathy for the Devil*.<sup>58</sup> The front cover picture shows a modified woodcut from a seventeenth-century book, *The World Turned Upside Down*, showing

<sup>56</sup> Cohn 1966; Segel 1996.

<sup>57</sup> See: De Michelis 2004, p. 403; and in Dutch: Smelik 2010, p. 205, Fig. 15.

<sup>58</sup> Credited in the liner notes of *The Internationale* as: ‘After reb Mikhel Jagger’.



FIGURE 11.6 Cover of W. Creutz, *Le Peril Juif!* IN: *LES PROTOCOLES DES SAGES DE SION*. NOT DATED, BUT FIRST EDITION 1934.

a bulbous figure standing on his head (Fig. 11.4A).<sup>59</sup> In the globe-like belly of this topsy-turvy personification a star of David has been inserted, thus literally putting the concept of “International Jewry” upside down. While the title of the CD seems to hint on an undisclosed leftwing assembly, another fling with Socialism (or rather Bundism) is suggested by the red colouring of the flag which had already appeared (though blank) on the original woodcut, as well as by the red banner on the backside of the gatefold.

So, is there only a blatant anti-Zionist significance to the lyrics or is there more to it? The first two original stanzas are in Yiddish, the same as in the original song. They are followed with Kahn’s very free translation: ‘Oh you foolish little Zionist/ With your utopian mentality/ You’d better go down the fac-

59 *World Turned Upside Down: No News, and Strange News*, ed. by J. Kendrew, Colliergate, York s.d.



tory/ And learn the worker's reality./ You want to take us to Jerusalem/ So we can die as a nation/ We'd rather stay in the Diaspora/ And fight (work/wait) four our liberation'. In the liner notes an asterisk is put after this last sentence which calls out a footnote stating 'this could also be sung as "and work for assimilation" or "and wait for annihilation," depending on one's political intention and/or historical perspective'.

An amateur video clip of a performance on 24 March 2011 in Beit Avi Hai, Jerusalem, proves that this remark did not remain a dead letter, since it shows Kahn repeating the comment and singing both variations of the refrain, together with Korolenko.<sup>60</sup> Kahn introduces the song: 'And we'll sing it in combination with another song, which is its dialectical opposite. And you can maybe make a synthesis out of it, but probably not'.<sup>61</sup> He refers to the hymn *Ikh heyb oyf mayn hand un ikh shver* ("I raise my hand up and I swear") of the Beitar Movement, a Revisionist Zionist youth organization founded in 1923 in Riga, Latvia, by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky (1880–1940).<sup>62</sup> The song also appears as number 5a on the CD *The Unternationale*, directly followed by song 5b *Di Hofnung* ("The Hope"), an English translation of *Hatikvah*, the national anthem of Israel.<sup>63</sup>

So we can state with certainty that *The Unternationale* is definitely not anti-Zionist, nor specifically *Bundist* for that matter, and its political scheme is more a kind of utopist *shpilleray*, as is the case with Medinat Weimar. Both Medinat Weimar and the *Unternationale* seem deliberately to respond to the fear of Jewish world power in humoristic way, which is perhaps the binding component. It is significant that Eidelman addresses the fear among the indigenous inhabitants of Thuringia by reassuring them that the Weimar Onion Market (*Zwiebelmarkt*) will not be cancelled, in contrast to the Weimar Klezmer

60 'Psoy Korolenko and Daniel Kahn, "Oy, you foolish Zionists", videoclip (uploaded by TheShenbuv on 1 April, 2011), YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEzTFPNRP6Q> at 0:15–0:25

61 Kahn says: 'We've got some other options for the *tāl'a* [refrain] here. Depending on your ideology you can sing it this way ...', in the video at 2:10–2:15. See for the Palestinian term *tāl'a*: Cohen and Katz 2006, p. 275.

62 'Psoy Korolenko and Daniel Kahn, Beitar song', videoclip (recorded in Beit Avi Hai, Jerusalem, 24 March 2011 and uploaded by TheShenbuv on April 2, 2011), YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKhD-dN3trQ>. See for the Beitar Movement: Jabotinsky 1935.

63 Credited as: 'The original Yiddish Beitar Song from the 1930s. Recorded in 2005 in Brest from Mikhail Lantsevitsky by Dmitry Slepovich and Nina Stepankaya. Transl. into English by Daniel Kahn, into Russian by Psoy Korolenko'. For the poem *HaTiq'vah* by Naphtali Herz Imber (1856–1909), see the liner notes and for its English translation by Jacob Goodman: Bradford Boni 1947.

Festival, for which there will no longer be any need when the New Jerusalem has been established.<sup>64</sup>

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64 Eidelman, *Podiumsgespräch*, Berlin, 14 January 2012.



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